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ABSTRACT

The image of the Puerto Rican in 33 books written between 1950 and 1980 for young adults was examined. Nine reviewers evaluated the books for their characterization of Puerto Rican sociceconomic status, demographic status, educational attainment, family representation, and male/female roles. The negative image of the Puerto Rican that emerged from the data resulted from four factors: an inappropriate perspective, an inaccurate representation of reality, omission of salient causes, and rigid portrayals. The books did not satisfy suggested criteria for ethnic literature (appropriateness, honesty, depth, and thoughtfulness) because they were inappropriate for their intended audience, underrepresentative of Puerto Ricans in American society, and superficial in their characterization. (RL)

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FACT OR FANCY:

THE IMAGE OF THE PUERTO RICAN

IN ETHNIC LITERATURE FOR YOUNG ADULTS

A Paper Presented at the 25th
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Fact or Fancy:

The Image of the Puerto Rican

In Ethnic Literature for Young Adults

This paper is based on the premise that ethnic literature plays a positive role in meeting the educational and psychological needs of all students. Ethnic literature is defined by Huck (1976) as "Books which authentically capture the unique experience and contributions of all minority groups (p. 45)." It evolved as a result of the demands by minority groups for a more accurate representation of their culture in the educational media. Crosby (1963), Keating (1967) and Huck (1976) have emphasized the role of ethnic literature in providing imaginative experiences which add a personal sense of belonging to one's immediate culture. These books also extend knowledge of the differences in customs, traditions, behavior and values breaking the barriers to understanding and communication.

G. Robert Carlson (1954: 7-10) states that young adult books help to fulfill three broad areas of student needs:

"1. They assure young people of their status as human beings.

2. They assure the developing adolescent of his normality.

3. They provide many roles for adolescents to test in order to determine what roles fit and what roles are incongenial to their personality."

The studies of Aspira (1967) and Alicea (1976) indicate that Puerto Rican adolescents are particularly in need of books which accurately reflect their culture and with which they can identify. Pantaja (1972: 25) states that Puerto Rican children must first learn about themselves as important parts of a world that was and is in order to develop a healthy self-image in a world which may be hostile and difficult.

This paper will discuss the image of the Puerto Rican in books written for young adults between 1950-1980. These findings are based on a review of thirty-three books as perceived by nine reviewers and reflect the following categories:

1. Socioeconomic status
2. Demographic status
3. Educational attainment
4. Family representation
5. Male-female roles.

The findings of this study are examined in the light of criteria for ethnic literature established by Giblin (1972:38) and others, in addition to the essential qualities of all "good" literature. Giblin (1972:38) cites the following criteria for evaluating ethnic literature: (1) appropriateness, (2) honesty, (3) depth and (4) thoughtfulness. Appropriateness refers to the

manner of presentation and intended audience. Honesty includes a full and fair presentation of both sides of a conflict, as well as the many dimensions of a personality. Depth indicates that the author's portrayal extends beyond the superficial characterization. And thoughtfulness shows evidence that sufficient information is presented to enable the reader to develop a broad perspective on the subject.

A summary of the factual data concerning the portrayal of Puerto Ricans in ethnic literature reveals four chief deficiencies:

The books fall short of meeting Giblin's criteria for young adult ethnic literature because (1) they provide an inappropriate perspective, (2) misrepresent reality, (3) omit significant causes, and (4) present rigid characters. These factors are illustrated by comparing the data in these books with current demographic and sociological studies and the portrayal of Puerto Rican protagonists with the portrayal of protagonists in other young adult literature.

The Picture of Puerto Ricans in Young Adult Literature

In 79 percent of the books Puerto Ricans are portrayed as uneducated slum dwellers, residing in the barrio of New York City, working at menial jobs or subsisting on welfare (see following table). Over 60 percent of the Puerto Rican families in these books are headed by single women, either widowed or deserted by

men. They work at low-skilled factory or domestic jobs, relying on welfare to meet their basic needs.

The male heads of families are either unemployed or occupied as busboys, dishwashers or custodians. In these books, neither fathers nor mothers indicate more than a minimal amount of education and many are unable to overcome their difficulty with English, depicted as a major obstacle to acculturation (see Table 1, p. 5).

TABLE 1

Puerto Rican Characteristics
As Depicted in 33 Young Adult Books
Published in the U.S.A. From 1950-Present

	No. of Books	Percentage
1. Character		
A. Age - Under 12 years	13	39
Over 12 years	20	61
B. Sex - Male	17	52
Female	16	48
2. Demographic Factors		
A. Setting - Barrio	26	79
Rural	1	3
City - Residential	1	3
Other	5	15
B. Section - Northeast	22	67
Southeast	11	33
C. Residence - Apartment	26	79
Project Housing	1	3
Home	1	3
Other	5	15
3. Education of Principal Character		
High School	11	33
Elementary School	10	30
Less than Elementary School	12	36
4. Socioeconomic Status		
High	0	0
Middle	0	0
Low	33	100

TABLE 1 - Continued

	No. of Books	Percentage
5. Family Background		
A. Mother's Occupation -		
Housewife	16	48
Domestic Worker	1	3
Welfare	2	6
Semi-skilled	5	15
Factory	3	9
No Mother	6	18
B. Father's Occupation -		
Unskilled	8	24
Skilled	4	12
Other	4	12
No Father	17	51
C. Number of Single Parents	23	70
No Mother	6	18
No Father	17	51

An Inappropriate Perspective

These books present an inappropriate perspective of Puerto Ricans for young adult readers because they compare their growth to the total population rather than examining the growth of Puerto Ricans as an individual group. For example, when one compares Puerto Rican socioeconomic status vis-a-vis the total population a negative picture emerges. According to the Decennial Census (1970) New York City Puerto Ricans are poorer than either whites or blacks. When the poverty level is defined as $3,828 per year, one

out of every three Puerto Ricans in New York City falls below the poverty line. The median family income for all Puerto Ricans is only $5,575 per year versus $7,000 for blacks and $9,682 for the total population. In addition, 64 percent of all Puerto Ricans earn less than $7,000 per year as compared with 49 percent of all blacks and 29 percent of all whites (U. S. Department of Labor, 1975:92).

In contrast to the above picture, a more positive image emerges when one compares the status of the early Puerto Rican migrant with his present situation. For example, the occupational status of Puerto Ricans changed significantly from 1950 to 1970 as illustrated by the following figures:

	1950	1970
Percent of Puerto Ricans in Management Jobs	5.7%	8.9%
Percent of Puerto Ricans in Clerical and Sales Jobs	9.7%	25.0%
Percent of Puerto Ricans in Blue Collar Jobs	77.0%	55.0%

In addition, mainland Puerto Ricans earned three times as much as island Puerto Ricans in 1950 but only twice as much in 1970 (U. S. Department of Labor, 1975:92,242). These figures indicate an

upward swing in the Puerto Rican socioeconomic status, but this growth is not reflected in the literature. Instead, the characters remain uniformly poor, with little variation over the thirty-year period, corresponding to the literary perspective in this study.

According to Huck (1976), Giblin (1972), Donelson (1979), and others, these books' perspective of reality is inappropriate for young adult readers because it does not consider their potential for change. The unformed aspirations of young adult readers are still subject to the influence of external factors such as books and films. If young adult books convey only a negative picture of reality, they defeat their purpose and shatter the hopes and aspirations of adolescent readers. Therefore, a more appropriate perspective and balanced representation of reality is desired in ethnic literature for young adults.

An Inaccurate Representation

The literary portrayal of the demographic status of the Puerto Rican presents an inaccurate representation of reality. In the literature surveyed the majority of Puerto Ricans reside in the barrio of New York, a section of East Harlem.

Within New York City Puerto Ricans are heavily concentrated in neighborhoods which have been designated as "low income areas", yet major population shifts have occurred within the city's five burroughs. During the 1950s, 70 percent of New York City's Puerto

Ricans resided in the Barrio of East Harlem, yet by 1970 this figure had dropped to 20 percent. Seventy percent of the city's Puerto Rican population resided in the Bronx and Brooklyn. In addition, a growing number of Puerto Ricans (although a small percentage of the population) also reside in Queens and Richmond (Severo, 1977).

Although 90 percent of all Puerto Ricans in the United States lived in New York City during 1940, by 1970 the percentage of Puerto Ricans living in New York had decreased to 54 percent (U.S. Commission of Civil Rights, 1976:21). In addition to New York, Puerto Rican communities also exist in New Jersey (Newark, Jersey City, Paterson, Hoboken), New England (Boston, Bridgeport, Hartford), Philadelphia, Chicago, Cleveland, Miami and Los Angeles. This change in demographic distribution is not reflected in the literature.

Educational Attainment

The literary portrayal of Puerto Rican educational attainment presents another inaccurate representation of reality. The literary sample portrays minimally educated Puerto Rican parents whose children have little interest in improving their educational status. (Over two-thirds of the principal characters have completed no more than elementary school.) The early Puerto Rican migrants

(1950) were more literate (an average of eight years of schooling) than the rest of the Puerto Rican population. Puerto Rican women outnumbered men in semi-skilled and professional occupations, but earned comparatively less money. Although their earnings increased upon migration to the United States, the status of all workers decreased due to the nature of the work performed. During this period 85 percent of all Puerto Ricans were blue collar workers.

The educational level for Puerto Ricans from 1960-1970 has progressed at a more rapid rate than the total population, but the gap between Puerto Rican educational attainment and the total population still remains. In 1960, 22 percent of the total population had completed twelve years of school as opposed to 9 percent of the Puerto Rican population. In 1979 this figure rose to 28.3 percent of the total population in comparison to 16.6 percent Puerto Rican (Decennial Census, U. S. Department of Labor, 1975:59).

The educational disparity between Puerto Rican and other New Yorkers widens with age. Most New Yorkers aged 20 to 25 entering the labor market have completed high school, usually with additional training. In contrast, the median number of years of school completed for Puerto Ricans aged 20 to 25 is eleven years.

The 67 percent drop-out rate for Puerto Ricans aged 16 to 21 is about the same as the rate for black students, but almost

twice that of other students in the public school system. Puerto Rican students are most severely affected by the difficulties encountered in learning to read and keeping up to grade level. The 1966 Coleman report showed Puerto Rican students at a disadvantage in first grade, with the gap increasing as the grade level progressed. Interestingly, Puerto Rican students born on the mainland ranked as well or better than non-Puerto Rican students, while the scores of students born on the island fell far below. This disparity in achievement scores between mainland and island-born Puerto Ricans implies that low achievement is a function of migration and/or language, where the change from a Spanish-speaking to an English-speaking area plays a predominant role. Accordingly, 40 percent of adult mainland Puerto Ricans lack basic literacy in English.

In contrast to these figures, opportunities for continued education have improved dramatically for Puerto Ricans who stay in school. For the period of 1960-1970, the number of Puerto Ricans in academic versus vocational schools rose 20 percent. In 1971, the inauguration of an "open admissions" policy at City University of New York brought a four-fold increase in the number of Puerto Ricans enrolled in college. Again, while the representation of Puerto Rican college students is still low compared to the total

number of college-age students, it accelerated at a faster rate. This rate jumped from 2.9 percent in 1967 to 7.4 percent in 1974. The trend is still increasing with the number of Puerto Rican students currently enrolled in City University in 1974 at 16,352, exceeding the total number of Puerto Rican college students a decade earlier (City University of New York Report of the Fall Undergraduate Ethnic Census, 1972 as cited in U. S. Department of Labor, 1975:56-57).

Like the omission of occupational change and residential shift for aspiring Puerto Ricans, another significant omission in the majority of books reviewed is the growing trend for high educational status. With the exception of three books, Frankie Cristo (Cintron, 1972), Nilda (Mohr, 1973), and Catch a Brass Canary (Hill, 1964), higher educational aspirations are not presented as viable alternatives to poverty. Instead, most books offer little hope for their protagonists' future other than a passive acceptance of the bleakness of barrio life.

Family Representation

As a result of social forces, various images of the Puerto Rican have evolved, differentiated by class, generation, education, racial sentiment and identity as well as the recency and frequency of movement. The omission of these variations in the image of the

fictional Puerto Rican over a 30-year period presents another failure to accurately represent social reality.

Male-Female Roles

The relative sex-role status assigned to fictional Puerto Rican characters represent the most rigid portrayals. By and large the women fare the worse, trapped in domestic servitude or dead-end factory jobs with no alternatives (Prida, Ribner, et al, 1972).

Most female characters in these books passively accept their roles with two exceptions: Felicidad, in The Girl From Puerto Rico (Colman, 1961) and Nilda (Mohr, 1973). A return to the island is Felicidad's solution to prejudice and discrimination, whereas Nilda's extraordinary artistic talent hints of a brighter future on the mainland. Only one female character openly expresses her dissatisfaction with her subservient role in life, Nilda's mother who, poignantly exclaims on her deathbed:

> "I have never had a life of my own ... yes, that's true, isn't it? ... That's not right ... I don't know what I want even. Hold on to yourself, even if at times you have to let go some ... but not all! Nilda ... not ever, a little piece inside has to remain yours always; it's your right, you know. To give it all up .. entonces, mi hijita, you will lose what is real inside you." (Mohr, 1973:278)

Fictional Puerto Rican males do not fare much better, stereotyped in domestic and occupational roles, as unemployed fathers,

unskilled laborers or absent husbands. Despite the wealth of literature on the warmth and nurturance of Puerto Rican family life (Fishman, 1972, Rogler, 1978, Cordasco, 1973), Puerto Rican family life in these books is flat and empty of meaning. The one exception occurs in Frankie Cristo (Cintron, 1972) whose parents seem totally involved in their concern for their children's welfare, illustrated by their reaction to Frankie's farewell.

> "Ma, I joined the Navy. I'm going away today." Frankie marveled at his mother. She even cried with cool. The tears flooded from her eyes, and she grasped him to her firmly and murmured every blessing she knew; but not once did she cry aloud or scream as he'd seen other women do in moments of anguish. 'Y la escuela?' Jose wanted to know. 'I can do it there, Pop ... honest. They pay my tuition ... and when I get out I'll have the G.I. Bill ...' Jose shook his head in disapproval. 'La escuela, mino ... no pierdas tu tiempo.' They embraced, kissed and Jose reached out a frail hand with two dollars. And Frankie left, tears in his eyes, Jose's words in his ears and the aroma of Juana's gurgling pot of Puerto Rican coffee in his nostrils (1972:50)."

Modifications in Puerto Rican sexual status and family life over a 30-year period of migration contrast sharply with the static literary portrayal. Recent studies (Fordham University, Note 1) of traditional sex roles and Puerto Rican family values indicate that the traditional concept of Puerto Rican manhood and womanhood appears to be changing to a more egalitarian model with increased exposure to education and Anglo-American society.

The double standard appears to be declining and Puerto Rican women are perceived as acquiring greater equality in the United States. Contrary to former studies (Handlin, 1959, Padilla, 1959, Sexton, 1966), research from Fordham University indicates that Puerto Rican men are not experiencing a great deal of difficulty in accepting the new, active role of Puerto Rican females.

Interestingly, while some traditional family values seem to be weakening with increased acculturation and education, in Fordham's study (Note 1) such family values as the sacredness of motherhood and the important role of children appear to be relatively unchanged.

Although fictional Puerto Rican women are limited to domestic and factory jobs, during the early migration period (1940-1950) they outnumbered men as machine-operators, clerical and professional workers. Four out of every ten Puerto Rican women were employed in these occupations, although their earnings for equivalent positions were always below men (Center for Puerto Rican Studies, Note 2).

Sixty percent of the books reviewed indicate a high incidence of female-headed families, another falsification of reality. In contrast to the literature depicting this condition as the norm for the majority of all Puerto Rican women, the

phenomenon of female-headed families is limited to a specific socioeconomic, age and residential group. The U. S. Department of Labor (1975:48) reports that this phenomenon has occurred recently (1960-1970) and among those Puerto Rican females aged 16 to 21 who have lived in the city less than five years.

Although this subject requires further explanation, it is not the focus of this study. Such factors as availability of employment, relevance of educational programs, welfare reform, accessibility of child-care and planned parenthood programs for Puerto Rican families need to be examined more closely.

Omission of Causes

In addition to a misrepresentation of reality, the books omit any causal factors bearing on the adjustment of Puerto Ricans. Various stages of Puerto Rican migration corresponding to the 30-year period of literature in this study (1950 to the present) resulted in modifications of Puerto Rican socioeconomic, demographic and family patterns. However, in contrast to reality, the literary image remains frozen. The omission of salient economic and sociological factors affecting the adjustment of Puerto Ricans creates a shallow impression of Puerto Ricans in young adult literature as unemployable, welfare-recipient barrio dwellers. Without sufficient information the reader can only conclude that Puerto Ricans are the source of their own problems.

Rodriguez (1977) offers a "structural" approach as another way of examining the conditions affecting people's lives. A structural approach examines the problems of people in relation to the conditions in which they find themselves, whereas a non-structural approach implies that it is the victim who is the root of the problem (p. 89).

Extensive evidence (the U. S. Department of Labor, 1975; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1976; Center for Puerto Rican Studies, Note 2; Maldonado-Denis, 1972; Rodriguez, 1977; Mendoza Report, 1979; Crewdson, 1979) indicates that the low socioeconomic status of the Puerto Rican is a result of three main factors: (1) economic attrition, (2) prejudice and (3) linguistic and cultural limitations. An examination of these factors may help explain the experience of the New York Puerto Rican and place it in its proper perspective.

Economic Attrition

Changes in the United States economy after the peak migration years of 1950-1953 reduced the availability and nature of jobs for Puerto Ricans. These changes included increased automation, sub-urbanization of industries, sectoral decline and union restrictions. Increased automation and suburbanization of industries produced a diminishing employment market for Puerto Ricans who had provided

the bulk of the blue collar labor force. Over 200,000 jobs, or almost two-thirds of the jobs held by Puerto Ricans in the New York area were in manufacturing, as compared with one-fifth for the total population. During the 5-year period ending in 1974, the city lost a third of a million jobs. The industries and occupations in which Puerto Ricans had been concentrated (the declining garment industry) were the ones which were moving out of the city. Low paying, insecure status jobs, such as those in hospitals, restaurants and hotels were available, but the more lucrative service jobs were filled by commuters from suburban districts.

Prejudice

While it is true that New York Puerto Ricans are more likely to be living in poverty than other New York City residents, Puerto Ricans of equivalent employment status, education, age and occupation still earn less than other New Yorkers. This evidence points to discrimination and prejudice as contributing factors, as well as declining employment opportunities.

In contrast to Puerto Ricans living in New York, those Puerto Rican families who live outside New York have family incomes more nearly comparable to other residents. Over the past decade

the income disparity between inner-city Puerto Ricans and those who live in the suburbs has grown larger. Severo (1977) suggests that there is a widening rift between the upwardly mobile Puerto Rican and the "welfare image" Puerto Rican and successful Puerto Ricans feel stigmatized by that image. The ambivalence within the suburban Puerto Rican community is illustrated by the desire of many Puerto Ricans to return to their roots, but to avoid chronic problems associated with the indigent "welfare Puerto Rican".

The prejudice of non-Hispanic whites who perceive the upward mobile Puerto Rican as undesirable, results in their rapid withdrawal from suburban neighborhoods, followed by a massive influx of welfare recipients. This identity crisis of the suburban Puerto Rican results in increasing assimilation and a loss of Hispanic culture and language. Increasing assimilation is illustrated by the number of inter-marriages between Puerto Ricans and non-Puerto Ricans. According to Severo (1977), 34 percent of Puerto Rican men married non-Puerto Rican wives, 32 percent of Puerto Rican women married non-Puerto Rican husbands and 44 percent of college educated Puerto Rican women married non-Hispanic whites.

Due to the overriding concerns about rising Puerto Rican unemployment and welfare, the middle-class Puerto Rican is invisible

in the media and the literature under review. Yet, just how true is the image of the welfare Puerto Rican?

Rodriguez (1977:4) refutes the claim that Puerto Ricans migrated to New York in order to be on welfare, by citing the significant time lag between migration and welfare assistance. During the 1950s when the great bulk of the Puerto Rican migration arrived who qualified for public assistance, there was a low rise in the amount of public assistance to Puerto Ricans. In the 1960s when high unemployment caused a rise in welfare payments for all ethnic groups, there was a corresponding increase in welfare assistance to Puerto Ricans. Yet, in 1970, 70 percent of Puerto Ricans were completely self-supporting. In addition, the "Mendoza report", a recent study made by the United States Department of Health, Education and Welfare (1979) concluded that New York City discriminated against Hispanic welfare clients and applicants (Quindlen, 1979).

Linguistic and Cultural Limitations

Unions, a former door for other ethnic groups, were closed to Puerto Ricans because of the contraction of the economy and ethnic and racial prejudice. In addition, the majority of Puerto Ricans were classified as non-whites by the white majority and subject to the same discrimination and prejudice as the blacks

who preceded them. Yet, full identification with militant blacks was not likely either, due to cultural differences and the role of the federal government in pitting blacks and Puerto Ricans against each other in the competition for federal funds.

Political leverage as an avenue of social mobility was also underutilized by Puerto Ricans because of language limitations and the intimidation and discouragement faced in their first attempts to register and vote (Crewdson,1979). Conversely, the level of political participation and voting in Puerto Rico ranks highest in the hemisphere (Rodriguez, 1974:96) and when voting encumbrances were removed by VOTE, a bilingual voter registration group, an overwhelming response was received from the Puerto Rican community.

Rigid Characterizati

In compariso to other books about young adults, the characters in these books appear lifeless and dull. They lack the complexity of feeling and motivation exemplified in such successful young adult novels as Catcher in the Rye (Salinger, 1976) and The Outsiders (Hinton, 1967).

For example, Felicidad, the main character in The Girl From Puerto Rico (Colman, 1969), illustrates the superficial character presented in the majority of books. She wants to

return to Puerto Rico because she has faced only poverty and prejudice in the United States. Rogler's (1978) study emphasizes the supportive role of the Puerto Rican family as a defense against adversity. Why is this support lacking in The Girl From Puerto Rico, and further, are there no alternatives to a passive acceptance of poverty and prejudice? Because the Puerto Rican characterizations are flat and unidimensional, the reviewers in this study found it difficult to empathize or identify with them. This lack of empathy is revealed by their comments below.

1. "Overall, the books were no good. The socioeconomic level was uniformly poor. They were not inspiring as books because there were no role models."

2. "The books fused into one moralistic impression. They were poorly written. I couldn't recommend any, even to Puerto Rican readers. They were 'old-fashioned', not up to date.

3. "The overall effect of the books was depressing. Life in the barrio is an eternal struggle for survival amid cultural dissonance."

4. "There was no positive stuff about Puerto Ricans as Puerto Ricans. They were mostly trying to be Anglos."

This last comment is most interesting because a common theme found in these novels is the overcompensation of the Puerto Rican protagonist in exchange for acceptance by Anglo-American society. For example, in City High Five (Heuman, 1964) Pedro (the lone Puerto Rican basketball player on the team) must prove that "he can take it" as well as the other members. Therefore, during the course of the game he not only sustains a number of serious injuries that would incapacitate any other players, but in spite of these injuries, also succeeds in scoring the necessary points for victory.

Another example of overcompensation occurs in A Present From Rosita (O'Dell, 1952) where Rosita submits the family's prized possession, her mother's hand-made wedding dress, as a costume for the school play in exchange for her classmates' recognition.

The readers found these books depressing because reality is portrayed as grim and mirthless. In contrast to other young adult novels, these books lack the levity of humor to balance the weight of reality. When a character can laugh at himself he invites the reader to share his problem through another perspective.

Bethancourt's (1975) New York City, Too Far From Tampa Blues, provides the lone example of humor in a barren field. His amusing description of his grandmother is refreshing.

> "I heard Abuelita long before I seen her. We lived on the top floor on Halsey Street and being as heavy as she was, it took her a while to get up the five flights of stairs. It was kind of like a horror movie. First, I hear this voice saying, 'Ay Dios!' Then there's a creak, creak, creak and another 'Ay Dios!' Ay Dios means 'Oh God' in Spanish and Abuelita says it like some people say 'crap' or 'I'll be damned'. ... In its own way it's kind of neat, because the way Abuelita tells it, every time you say it, its like praying and it cuts down on the time you got to spend in Purgatory after you die and before you go to heaven." (p. 59)

The books about Puerto Ricans are depressing because the characters are unable to overcome the debilitating effects of poverty and evoke pity rather than empathy. Although other young adult books discuss similar themes (alienation, identity crisis, the need for understanding and support from authority figures), their stories are told from the views of the protagonist, not the expectations of society. In contrast, books about Puerto Ricans imply that the characters are at fault for failing to live up to society's expectations, instead of the reverse situation.

Both Puerto Rican and Anglo-American adolescents are alike in their search for self-fulfillment, but the fulfillment of this need differs between the two groups because of the lower status assigned to Puerto Ricans. Until their economic and social

realities are portrayed in a more sympathetic light, Puerto Rican adolescents will find it difficult to discover positive images of themselves in young adult literature.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the negative image of the Puerto Rican which emerges from a tally of the objective data appearing in young adult literature results from four factors: (1) an inappropriate perspective, (2) an inaccurate representation of reality, (3) omission of salient causes, nd (4) rigid portrayals. These books do not meet Giblin's (1972) criteria of appropriateness, honesty, depth and thoughtfulness because they are inappropriate for their intended audience, under-representative of Puerto Ricans in American society, and superficial in their characterization.

Just why the portrayal of Puerto Ricans in young adult books suffers from these deficiencies is unclear. It does not seem likely that these authors hold any ill-will toward their subject, else why write ethnic literature? Nor, (assuming their professional competence) does it seem plausible that they are more naive or unscholarly than authors of other adolescent literature. Therefore, barring any commercial motivations, a possible explanation for the limitations of these books is the prevailing philosophy stressing the disparity between the Puerto Rican's status and that

of the total population. Accordingly, this perspective emphasizes the under-achievements of a struggling minority in comparison to the achievements of an advantaged majority.

When the perspective focuses on the gains of third-generation Puerto Ricans compared to first-generation migrants thirty years ago, a new image arises. In this light we see a people who have made admirable, although incomplete, gains in educational and occupational status. Further, when viewed over time, against a background of sociological and economic changes in U. S. society, this image takes on a new dimension. The deprivations suffered by Puerto Ricans no longer appear to be their own doing, but society's doing. Thus, a more balanced picture appears of a people making some headway against the debilitating effects of poverty and discrimination.

A sense of balance is necessary in young adult literature because adolescents need to read books about fictional characters capable of changing to meet life's demands (Giblin, 1972; Huck, 1976; Peck, 1970). The best books portray adolescence as a maturing process where protagonists have a sense of becoming. The worst portray youth in a vacuum, where protagonists are hopelessly doomed, locked in an environmental prison. Realism does not always have to be negative. As educators and readers we must also

ask about the portrayal of essential qualities such as honesty and integrity for believable characters who mature and change.

Writers of ethnic literature, such as Philip Roth, argue that a novelist has no obligation to write a "balanced portrayal" of life but only to write of "life," but this point of view is not universally accepted. For example, Irving Howe sees "Precision and fullness of character as the requirements of any good literature," (1974:714). Writers for young adults carry a special charge. The adolescent reader's social development is not fixed, but is still in the process of formation. This reader is still searching for truths which good literature can provide.

Just as it is dishonest to conclude a story for fifteen year olds with "they lived happily ever after", it is dishonest to portray only the pessimism of the barrio where maturity always means corruption or stagnation. Reality is not uniformly grim. Readers are entitled to know that a bright side can exist. If young people find hope in the books they read, they may also find the strength to survive the everyday corrosive aspects of their lives.

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